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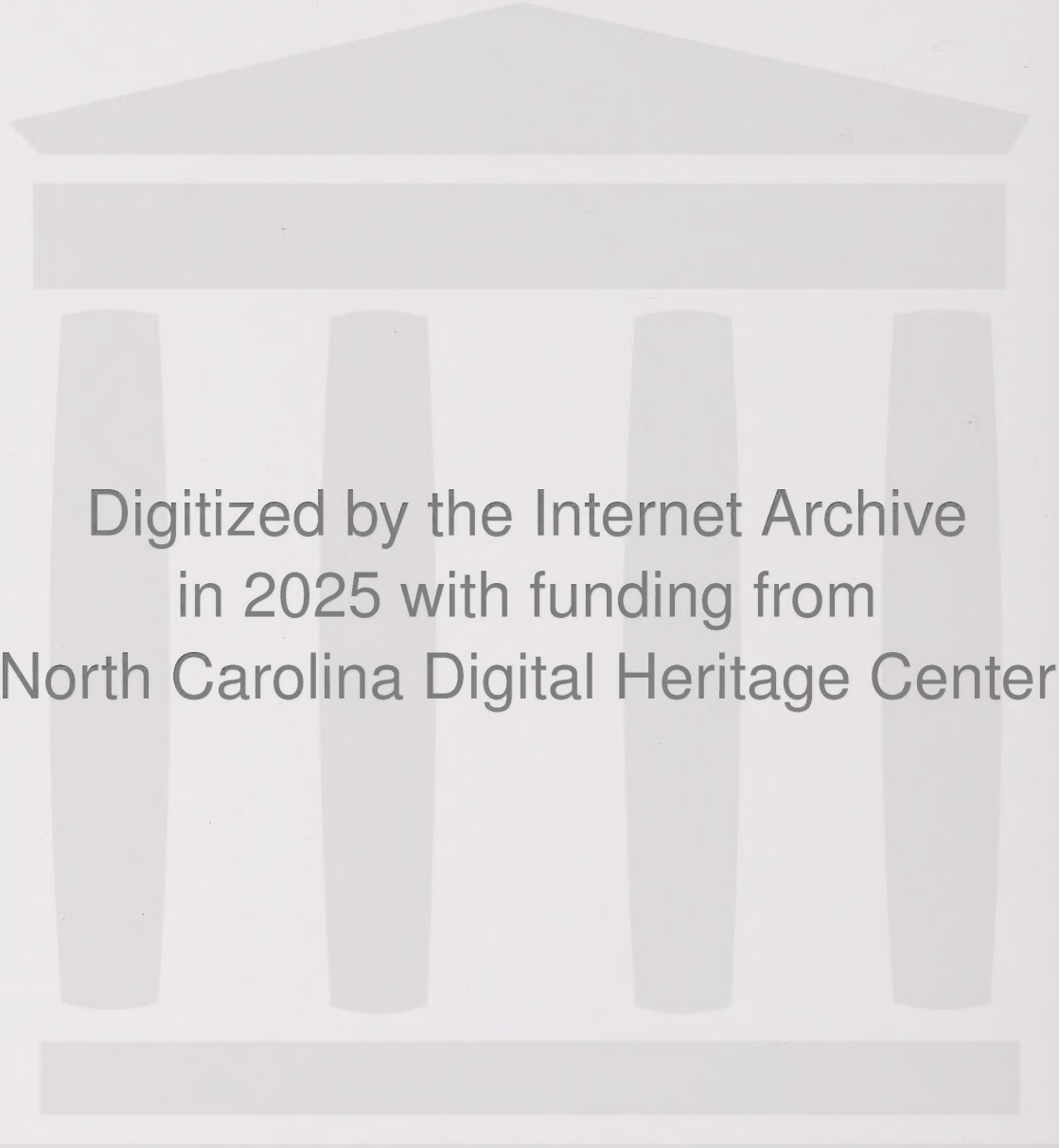
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PRISM
2019

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Poetry

River Bend

Mikayla Johnson-Davis

Pebbles rippled through the still river
as my sister and I picnicked next to it.
The birds sang their evening songs
and the wind swept our faces.
Trees swayed gently,
children in the nearby park
played
and played
and played.

We agreed to have ourselves a picnic
if we ever needed time alone together.
Neither of us ever thought it would become a weekly routine,
just us two,
bonding over the beautiful scenery.
She clutched another pebble in her hand,
pausing,
as if to contemplate letting it skip across the river once more.
Rubbing the smooth surface of the small stone,
she let it loose into the crystal blue water.

We sat there,
watching every leaf of brown, orange, and red
flutter down into the river, calmly floating downstream.
As the golden sun slipped behind the roofs of neighboring houses
and children staggered home,
she smiled and we headed home ourselves.

I still see that river
whilst the twinkling glow
of the late autumn sun
shimmers in its reflection
and the edges of the banks
get covered in golden leaves.

Distance

Erik Moss

Barely out of the driveway, and she knows things are just beginning
The tires screech, the engine roars
But for once, her head isn't spinning
Three blocks away, still flying down the asphalt, and she knows she's been farsighted
She can't help but think that she could go back
But no, her heart is decided
Speeding down the interstate, she wonders how far, at least ten miles by now
There's just no way she could ever go back
She wishes she'd forget how
Across the state border, in the dark of night, she parks the truck by a tree
Everything hurts; she's tired and hungry
But none of it matters--she's free

Changing Seasons

Kassie Burton
Photography

Daydream

Mikayla Johnson-Davis

Hello silence,
a deception of reality and
judgement for
which so many long for,
including me

fantasizing a grand castle
so high in the skies
it sits elegantly on clouds,
until those clouds wisp away
and leave me stranded
on glittering stars above the
moonlite field.

That field which dances
against the mild breeze and
sings of such marvelous wonders
beckons for a force,
an unknown force, calling
whatever it may be
closer

And still I sit, high
above the clouds and with
the stars and moon, do
I watch and wait, my castle
so far up above the struggles
of reality and judgement

You're So Human

Rachael Thomas

A heart, a mind, a soul
All wrapped into one flesh
All part of a person
People are unique
Not one is like the other
In looks, in skills, in talents, in behavior, and feelings
One is different from the next
Or so it seems
We all have something in common
We all know pain

We hurt
We cry tears until our cheeks burn
There are days when we feel sadness
There are moments we can never get over
Or even forget
Moments of loss and sorrow
Sometimes we try and try
But we fail
And we bleed
Crimson dripping or gushing out
The air growing thinner and breathes shorter
And then finally, we fall
Cold, alone, empty
Only the shadows are left to consume us

All we want is to be saved
To be rescued from the dark
We want to feel loved
To be held and kissed
We want warmth
For the ice to melt away
We want to always feel safe
From the demons who eat us
Both inside and out
We want to feel perfect
We want to know security
We want to feel it all
And we want it to live in us
Forever

But we aren't perfect
We never will be
Mistakes will be made
But why
Why must the light feel so far away
Why can't we have it right now

Because
We're human…

Stars

Rachael Thomas

They hang above you only at night
They are so small, but provide you light
People use them to sail far away
Because they know, the stars will guide their way
Every star has a name
Each person tries to guess it, as if they are playing a game
You sit under them and try to count
Even though you will never truly know the right amount
You can sleep peacefully as they watch over you
Maybe they will make your dreams sweet too
But most of all you can make a wish
Even if all you want is a good night kiss

A Love Letter to all of the Pieces of Myself

Tori Barker

I love you loud mouth, volume rising with excitement
I love you unsure about commitment
I love you mothering friend who doesn't know when to shut up
I love you short, when you can't reach the cups

I love you attitude because you didn't get your way
I love you "Today's gonna be the day!"
I love you wrong, even when you're really wrong
I love you like a love song

I love you wholly and proud because you are all pieces of me

I love you flirt with eyes and head and mouth
I love you cry baby, eyes like a spout
I love you crazy, when you don't make sense
I love you sad and intense

I love you mean, though you shouldn't be mean
I love you kind because you are really kind
I love you dedicated and consistent
I love your dark side and innocence

I love you when you're mad
I love you when you're bad
I love you when you hate
I love you when you celebrate

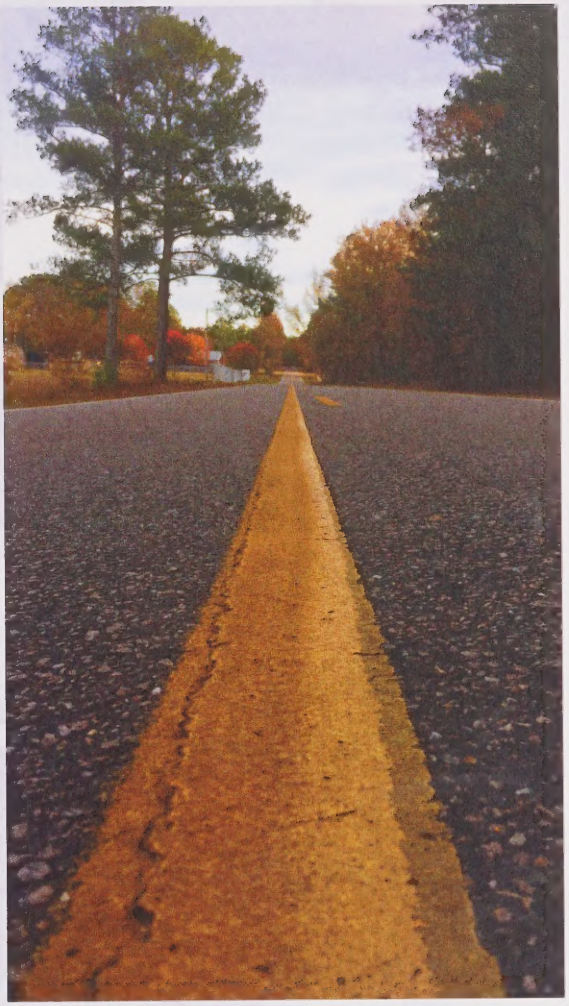
I love you so deeply and true because this is all of you

I love the happiness you spread
I love the bad songs in your head
I love the way you shine
I love the ways you waste time

I will always love you, even when I can't. I will always try even when it's hard. I will always look for the better and accept the worse.

You are all the pieces of me, whether I like them or not.

I will keep reminding myself to love myself and I hope you do the same



Untitled

Lauren Lane
Photography

That's How I Found Her

Mikayla Johnson-Davis

That's how I found her, floating
softly beneath the glittering sky,
a deep lavender destined for peace
and tranquility

That's how I found her, drifting
away from hopes and dreams-her
hopes and dreams-away from the
nightmares
that once trapped her here

That's how I found her, leaving
me, leaving us, and finding more
something that kept us in fear of
his ever growing darkness

And that's how I found her, bruised,
battered, bloody
a warning to never leave or
face those same consequences

I had to tell them, I had to,
or they would find out what
was lurking in the waters,
all because of her

Yes, that's how I found her,
cold,
    wet,
        still...
            and of course...***dead***

White Man

Alani Rouse

So then the white man tells me
"You'd be so much prettier if you smiled"

White man spoke to me like I wasn't me
Product of my mother and father
Face of resilience and excellence
My father is the Voice you answer to, and the face of your next conference
My mother is Superwoman
World is her hands, shapes into anything she needs it to be, embodies god being a woman. My mama fights in heels. whips her tenacity around her dreams, dreams come soaring into her hands to stay
Like they were made for her, cause what ain't made for her
Still, white man won't understanding

White man said I'd be prettier if I smiled
Tell me
Fuck I got to smile for?
I'm already doing more than I should be
Standing here
This resting bitch face ain't exclusive
It's a mask
Ain't nobody ever told you? Depression ain't good for business baby

Don't nobody give a fuck about black struggle
I be tryna kill myself and be my life saver
This is armor
Black girl trades in tears for attitude
Trades in personality for assimilation
Black girl washes microagressions and oppression out her hair on washday
Being black give me a different type of privilege

To be african american is to have never left bondage

To be African and American is to have no independence day
Cause the fuck july fourth got to do with me?
Use the day to play spades and drink kool aid
Bask in what little culture I have of my own cause everyone thinks it's to take
To share
Like damn
Cause I don't have a country to be proud of

I will say, being black taught me more languages than many think
I got Ebonics
And sarcasm
Got my black girl on the phone
I know compliance
I know how to speak survival

This is a full time job
I double as target practice and money signs
I wish I could wear all white and have privilege
Black culture for sale and my skin too
Better hope they don't put me in a grave or make me a slave
Plantations----I mean prisons make white man rich
Black culture for sale and my skin too

Some days I fight myself and look wonder what I got to smile about
Why I need to look pretty for you
White man
Colonizer
Patriarchy
Face of entitlement
What I got to look pretty for you for?
Ain't you got enough to look at the way you look down on everyone who ain't you?

But it's fine
Next time someone tells me I'd look prettier
Next time a white man tells me I'd look prettier if I smiled
I'll tell him I'd look prettier in my country
Better with all my identity
Not dressed in oppression, depressions or all these fucking Microagressions
Would look prettier with equity
With my brothers free
With Reagan locked up cause he sold more coke than half the local plugs doing life

But I'm sure it's easy for him to say
His name don't spell struggle
Mouth cant even fix to say the word
He might be right
I might look prettier if I smiled
But who gone give me some shit to smile about?

Forest of Lost Thoughts
Damian Perry
Photography and Photoshop

Disorder

Erik Moss

He's always alert, wherever he may wander
While the rest of the world may be asleep
He's watching, listening, constantly observing
They tell him he just doesn't need to.
He can't stop himself, he's always on edge
Although others would not even care for what he sees
He's thinking, analyzing, his mind never rests
They wonder why he even bothers.
He seems to feel everything, physical or otherwise
The "normal" people can just brush it all away
Too loud, too rough, not quite right and it *hurts*
They say he's entirely too sensitive.
They look at him mockingly, cocked brows and accusation
He cares, to an extent, but they do him no harm
They're content to just cruise through life, not knowing
It matters not, he needs only himself
They all seem to relish in it, the strangeness of it all
He feels as if he can see an issue in everything
Why don't they seem worried about how wrong it all is?
He feels as if he carries this burden alone
Throughout it all, he muscles on through
He wouldn't really ever want to stop
He's always awake, forever tempering his mind
For in spite of it all, with his thoughts, he is free

Alysia

Alani Rouse

On the days that life was too much to handle
The days I was 'That Girl,' Alysia Harris held her hand against my back
Words served as reassurance
A listening ear without me speaking a word

Alysia was all the first aid kit I needed
Fixed me up in bathrooms during classes
Late at night
Reminded me to never be that girl
To try to become that woman

I memorized her words instead of replaying my first loves
'That Girl' repaired this girl every time
Made me want to be that woman
Be strong and forgiving
Be strong and enough
Be strong and moved on

On the days I felt like my love language was too complicated
Feel like no one wants to learn how to speak to me
The old her, reminds me someone does
Cause she did
Loved like me
Clothes and soul as offering
Tithed time
Communed in relapse and wet rivers, courtesy of my eyes

Alysia gave me church in bathroom stalls
Preached to me as many times as I needed her to
Had a plethora of sermons for me to reference to
Poet community served as choir when she was not preaching
I used to want to hear her uplift me in person
Take me back through her past to pull me through my present
Shield my eyes from old pictures
Slow my heart when I saw him
Heard from him
Didn't hear from him

Untitled
Lauren Lane
Photography

Wanted her to do the hard work twice
Until I didn't
Because how satisfying it was to free myself
To love with no bondage
Without using scraps of a stranger as reference
On the days that life was too much to handle
Alysia packed away my heartbreak
Stripped me of his t shirts and ended our life settled in my words

On the days that I couldn't find myself
The days I sometimes can't find myself I find god in the woman I hope to be
The woman of my dreams
The next time I feel as though life is too hard, I'll remember how I had to be this girl to be that woman.

Short Stories

Sightless

Rachael Thomas

Detective Oliver Moore felt fury as he stared at the potential murderer, who was sitting across from him. Handcuffs were locked around the suspect's wrists, a chain attaching them to a table. Moore glared at the suspect, a man in his mid-thirties, his blonde hair already fading and his eyelids sagging behind his large, square glasses. Who would have guessed this mousy human being, who looked like he would flinch at the sight of any sudden movements, was in custody for possibly murdering his wife?

"I didn't kill her, Detective," the suspect said. Moore had seen various patterns of behaviors in suspects, but no matter how cocky or anxious they appeared, it didn't prove they were guilty. Not alone at least. The suspect's eyes drew down to his wedding ring, the dirty, gold band wrapped around his finger. "Innocent until proven guilty," he said aloud.

Moore left the room, rage sweltering inside him. His partner handed him a cup of coffee, steam rising from it. Moore took it cautiously. "Rough day, Moore?" his partner asked rhetorically. Moore took a sip, the hot drink glossing over his tongue before falling down his throat. He let out a breath, the warmth of it fading as it left his mouth.

"I know this guy killed his wife," he replied. His partner only pressed his lips together, a motion he always made when he disagreed with someone. "Don't let his wimpy appearance fool you," Moore commented. "He did it." Moore believed there was something more hiding under the skin of the jittery suspect.

"Well, maybe if you would quit yelling at the poor guy, you could get somewhere," Moore's partner replied. "Why are you so dead set that he did it?" Moore took another sip of his drink before replying.

"The evidence is there," he said. His partner sighed. Moore always saw his partner as the less determined, but more moral of the two. "But something is missing," Moore continued. "One last piece of the puzzle and we'll have him." His partner opened the suspect's file and shuffled through the papers. It was true that there was evidence, but it was exactly what Moore had said. Something was missing. Moore's partner stared at the photo of the suspect's dead wife. He had seen so many photographs of dead victims before, but each one always made his skin crawl.

"Well, even if he did kill his wife, you need that missing piece to prove it," Moore's partner said. Moore looked down at his cup, his disappointed and annoyed reflection looking back at him.

"Yes," he replied. "And I know someone who can find it."

The suspect was turning his wedding ring around his finger, a nervous tic, when the door to the interrogation room opened again. He was surprised to not see Moore or any other investigators step in. The person approaching him was a young girl, possibly in her mid-twenties. Her hair was long, hanging down past her shoulders, and was jet black. Her skin appeared a bit pale from a lack of sun. Oddly, there was a blindfold tied around her head, covering her eyes.

"Hello?" the suspect said, shyly. "What's with the blindfold?" The girl only came forward and sat down. She stayed silent as she reached up and slowly pulled at one of the ends of the blindfold.

The slick cloth released its grip and gracefully drifted away from the girl's eyes. They were looking

straight at the suspect, focused on their target, yet somehow dispersed at the same time. Not a single vein could be seen in the white her irises bathed in, her lids most likely covering any red, curvy lines. The girl's irises were large, a thick, black ring circling the outside of each, like the outline of a drawing. As for color, there was none. They weren't brown, blue, or a mixture of multiple pigments. They were blank, filled with an unusual combination of milk and a heavy fog. The girl's pupils were gone, consumed by the murky swamps of her irises. Both her eyes had bright glares, sitting diagonally towards the top of her irises. Overall, her eyes appeared glassy, like crystal orbs.

"Can I know your name at least?" the suspect asked, wanting to learn more about the person inches across from him. The girl had been folding up her blindfold in her lap when he asked. She placed the cloth on the table in front of her when she was done.

"Avery," she said. "Your name is Cecil Cox." The suspect nervously smiled. He slipped his fingers into each other to keep them still. He squeezed his ring between the index and middle finger of his right hand. "You were arrested two days ago, convicted for the murder of your wife, Cynthia Cox." Avery finished. The man shivered and sniffled. The once-beautiful sound of his wife's name was only a reminder of her demise.

"I didn't kill her," Cox replied, his voice beginning to wail. "She committed suicide."

Avery blankly gazed at Cox as his eyes began to fill with tears. His wailing grew louder. "I'm sorry for your loss, Mr. Cox." Avery said. Cox's saddened expression immediately changed, tears escaping his lids.

"No, you aren't! That jerk of an investigator kept convicting me of killing Cynthia!" he yelled. Avery drew her attention to the heartbeat in Cox's chest. The thumping repeated itself over and over, like large footsteps stomping. She could smell the sweat starting to form on the man's skin, mixing with the day-old nicotine scent in his clothing, which Avery had first picked up on not long after entering the room.

"Mr. Cox, I don't mean to add to your burden, but I must ask something of you," she said. Cox drew in a long breath, the sound of mucus being pulled up his nasal cavities. "May I?" Avery continued. She reached a hand forward, letting it sit in midair. She had to have permission first.

Cox licked his cracked lips and swallowed a lump in his throat. "Sure..." he said.

Avery's hand slowly drifted over to Cox's cheek. He slightly shivered when her fingertips touched him before her palm carefully pressed against his skin. It was moist, his pores oozing. Avery ignored the gooey feeling. They were yelling. Screaming really. Avery bent her fingers, feeling a prickle under them, a result from Cox not shaving for two mornings. Hate. There was so much hate. Avery stood up, bending over the table a bit in the process. Her other hand reached forward, placing itself on the other side of Cox's face. She could feel where the tears had snaked down his

The Rose (2017)
Rachael Thomas
arcrylic

cheeks, the rivers they made cooler than the sticky sweat. He was angry. Furious.

Her hands continued to move, heading towards Cox's mouth and nose. She quickly moved them back up, realizing that his nose was running again and that a bit of drool was hanging from his lower lip. Her palms made their way to his hair, drifting over his thinning locks, staying on the surface and not exploring the forest of his scalp. She then touched his ears, along with the parts of his glasses that sat on them, before letting her hands fall to his jawline, the skin no longer tight around it, having aged over the years. She deserved to boil in Hell. Finally, Avery felt his chin. Cox swallowed, his neck pushing against her fingers for a few seconds.

"Are you done?" Cox asked. The chain between his handcuffs rattled. He wanted to pull her hands off him.

"Be patient. I don't have a full image yet," Avery said. She placed her hands back over his cheeks, her thumbs pressed against the sides of his nose. He was going to send her there.

Cox's eyes looked left and right at Avery's hand, an unsettling feeling forming inside him. Avery's palms were soaked, yet she kept them firmly on his face. She closed her misty eyes, as she breathed, multiple scents entering at once. She took pills for her nerves. They had to be calmed.

"Mr. Cox, your wife took too may pills the night she died. Correct?" Avery asked. He handed her a glass of Pepsi and a pill. She was shaking as she took it. It would help her sleep through the night. Avery put one hand down.

"Yes, and then she drowned herself," Cox replied. Avery's other hand remained on him as he spoke. She was in the bathtub; the water having spilled over the edge. Her hair flowed around her. Avery remained calm as more formed out of the shadows that always plagued her. He sprinkled them into the Pepsi. They had been crushed. Avery pulled her hand back from Cox and opened her eyes again, even though they would still only see black. "I'm innocent. I swear," Cox said.

Avery sat back down. "No Mr. Cox, you killed your wife."

A frustrated groan scraped Cox's throat as his fists clenched. "I didn't kill Cynthia. That's what I told the investigators! That's what I've told you!" he yelled. It was the same tone and volume Cox had used when he was fighting with his wife. The same exasperation was in his voice.

"You did well covering it all up, making it look like she killed herself. However, you made one mistake," Avery replied. The sound of shuffling reached Avery's ears. Moore, his partner, and others were heading towards the door. Avery braced herself, Cox's heart beat louder than before. His breaths were short, being pulled in and pushed out quickly. "You crushed her meds and once she began to overdose you put her in the tub. You hid a murder behind a fake suicide," Avery stated. Cox jutted forward, the cuffs restraining him. He snarled as the door opened. Moore and multiple cops burst in, immediately heading towards Cox.

"You liar! You little liar!" Cox yelled at Avery. Moore quickly grabbed Avery's chair, pulling her back. "I didn't kill her!" Cox yelled. He fought against the cops' holds.

"Check the table in the garage. He forgot to clean up the dust," Avery said to Moore.

****

Avery was reading, her fingers running over small, round bubbles, when she heard someone enter the room. Her hand slowed before stopping at the end of the sentence. She had been facing the wall across the couch she was sitting on as she read. Moore closed the door behind him, a folder in his hand. Cox's photo

was peeking out from the top of it. "Were the crumbs still there?" Avery asked. She already knew the answer though. Moore opened the file and read its contents.

"On March 20th, 2022, Cecil Cox committed murder against his wife, Cynthia Cox," he started, before explaining the rest. Avery already knew all the details, having seen them, but she listened diligently. A smile crossed her face as she leaned back, making sure not to move her hand off the braille and lose her place. "Good job, Avery. Another victim's case solved and another killer locked away." Moore finished. Avery nodded.

"Until next time," she replied, as her hands started to move again.

****

"Hold your fire!" someone yelled, as the entire station raised their pistols. A man standing in the center of the room slowly raised up his hands in surrender. His expression was content, as he allowed himself to be grabbed and pushed to the ground, handcuffs clamping around his wrists. Nobody had noticed the man walk in at first, since everyone was preoccupied with paperwork, computer screens, and phone calls. Moore didn't look up until he heard the shouting, but he caught the man's eyes looking straight at him before he was forced to the floor. Moore stood and stepped out from behind his desk to get a better look at the commotion. The man was still sharply looking at him, his body flat on the ground. Moore felt the man's gaze pierce him like a sharp knife. But the words he spoke made Moore feel slightly numb.

"I want to speak to her!" the man said loudly. "I want to speak to Avery!"

The man was sitting in the same room that Cecil Cox and many other suspects had been in before, handcuffed to the table, waiting for investigators to come in and squeeze out every drop of information they could find. "I don't know who this man is," Moore stated to the police chief standing next to him, the two watching the new suspect on a TV screen. The look in the man's eyes was branded in Moore's mind, haunting him like a ghost. "I've never seen him before."

The police chief held up a file. Its edges were bent and cracked, the folder showing its age of a few years. "His name is Joseph Owens. He's a suspect, linked to the possible murders of multiple people," the chief said.

Moore took the file from his superior, opening it and looking through its contents. "We've been searching for him for five years now," Moore said, this piece of information standing out to him the most. This wasn't the first time Moore had ever seen a case go unsolved for years, but he found it odd that he had not heard of Owens until now. He assumed it must have been assigned to a different investigator and then later forgotten.

"I want to speak to Avery," Owens said aloud, knowing he could be heard through the security camera in the room. Moore lowered the file, looking back at the screen. Owens's eyes were locked on him again, as if he could see through the camera.

The Summits of Comprehension

Damian Perry

Photography and Photoshop

"How does he know who Avery is?" the chief asked. Moore was unsure how to answer, a road block he despised, especially when speaking to his superior. Moore always knew there was a truth behind every suspect, whether they were guilty or innocent. However, this time he felt that he didn't want to find out what was behind the curtain.

Avery stepped into the room, the blindfold around her head as usual. "You don't need to wear that thing," Owens said. "I want to see those shiny pearls." Avery only continued to walk forward, keeping her eyes covered, not breaking away from the same habit she performed with every suspect. She sat down quietly, pulled the blindfold away from her face, folded it, and placed it on the table. She heard the creaking of a chair, Owens leaning forward, most likely to get a better look at her eyes. Avery stayed still, standing her ground. She reminded herself how often she was confronted with suspects and this one would be no different. "They were always lovely, even though their wings have been clipped," Owens commented.

Avery had heard many comments about her blindness before. Some suspect would taunt her about the dark world she lived in, while others only noticed and kept silent. It was nothing new to her. "I'm not here to flirt," Avery said, combating Owens's statement. Owens chuckled.

"I'm not flirting, honey," he said. "How long have you been blind anyways?" Avery wasn't interested in the conversation, but was used to it. She knew how to play the game.

"All my life," she said. Owens laughed again, snorting this time.

"So, you don't even know what the world around you looks like? Not even colors," Owens said. Avery knew her next words would, in a way, be a lie. The only times she had ever seen what was outside her closed shades was in the memories of the suspects she touched. They were only fragments, some filled with hate, blood, and death and others with fear and confusion, but all of them a truth. She never desired to see the horrors or guiltless sufferings of life, but they were her only outlets beyond her imagination that touch, smell, sound, and taste provided.

"No," Avery said to Owens. She then realized it had taken her a few long minutes to answer his question.

"Touch my face," Owens said. Avery kept her hands in her lap. "Don't you want to add more to the map?" Owens taunted. Avery had dreaded putting her hands on the faces of suspects when she first developed her powers, around five years ago. She wanted no contact with them, even if finding out they were innocent or guilty would bring justice. But she needed to do her job. Avery reached her hand out and placed it on Owen's cheek.

The darkness Avery dwelled in brightened, an unusually fast start to the experience she soon realized. The visions always came a couple of seconds after she made contact, but this one was instant. There was no time between the contact and the memory. The scene cleared, Avery seeing lights hanging directly above her, shining down. A man was standing over her, covered in head to toe in a blue surgical suit. Only his brown eyes could be seen. "Does the subject have enough anesthetic?" the doctor asked, his mouth moving under his mask. He looked away from Avery, across the room.

"Yes," a woman's voice replied. The faint sound of medical tools being handled could be heard. The doctor looked back down at the patient on the bed, Avery seeing it all from their point of view.

"Good, then we can begin," he replied.

Avery tried to pull out of the memory. It was not an action she often took, but at times she wanted to void her mind from some experiences. This vision was one of them. But she couldn't break free. All she had to do was pull her hand away and cut the link between her and Owens. However, she couldn't feel her hand

or any other parts of herself, paralyzed in place. It was as if her mind had been severed from her body. She was trapped, held hostage by the memory playing out in front of her. That was when she noticed another aspect of this vision. It wasn't coming in pieces like all the previous times she had looked into the minds of potential criminals. It was coming all at once. The doctor slowly leaned down, inches away from the patient's face. He then pulled the mask down to reveal a firm jawline, a broad nose, and a small, thin smile that appeared mischievous.

"Avery," he said. That was when Avery recognized his voice. It belonged to the man whose face she was touching. "Do you remember now?"

The memory grew bright again, before quickly burning out, as the feeling in Avery's body returned. She quickly jutted back from Owens, almost causing her chair to topple back. Her hand felt hot from where it had been on his cheek, and it began to shake. "What-what was..." Avery spat out. Her mind raced with confusion.

"You thought you were the only one?" Owens said. She didn't understand any of what she had just seen or heard. Avery rubbed her eyes, as if to clear them of dirt. She felt the vibrations of fast footsteps, Moore, and the others rushing to the door at high speed. "They framed me after I ran," Owens continued. "Because I helped make you."

The door flew open, with Moore and the rest charging in. Avery turned her head towards the door as though she could see it. The sound of shoes against the hard floor filled the room, voices all yelling at the same time. Avery could barely make out who was speaking, until she heard Owens say, "Oliver Moore." The name of her superior. The officers unlocked Owens from the table, dragging him form the room. Owens didn't fight back. "Wake up Avery!" he yelled.

Avery didn't move from her chair as the room emptied. She placed her hands on her temples, making a circular motion against her skin. A splitting headache was coming. She heard someone re-enter the room as the commotion made its way down the hall. "Avery, are you okay?" Moore asked. Avery's head shot up, frantic at his presence. "What did you see?" Moore asked. There had been many times before when Avery had been disturbed and shaken by visions. This time, however, was much worse.

"Who was that man?" she asked. Moore leaned down in front of her.

"We've been looking for him for years. He's been convicted for multiple murders." Avery hung her head down again, afraid to face Moore, even though she couldn't see him.

"He knew your name," she replied.

"That's strange," Moore replied, recalling how Owens kept staring at him hours earlier. "I've never seen him before." Avery's hand had cooled, but was still shaking. In fact, both her hands were shaking now. An urge was present in them, as if they had minds of their own. Avery turned her palms over and rested the backs of her hands on her lap.

"What did you see?" Moore repeated. That was when Avery jumped forward, her hands out, knowing Moore's guard was down. She dug her nails into his cheeks. Avery clenched every muscle in her body, attempting to keep her hold on the man she trusted. Or perhaps once trusted.

"The subject will be in soon," she heard Moore say. A file appeared before her eyes, a photo of a dark-haired girl paperclipped in it. "She's ready."

Avery felt Moore grasps her wrist and pull her away. "Avery!" he yelled. He released her wrists once her hands were off of him. "I told you to never abuse your ability!" Avery scurried away from him, after falling onto the floor. "Avery?" Moore continued. She only shook her head.

"What did you do?! What did you do to me?!" she cried.

Moore stood up as Avery pulled herself to her feet with the chair as support. She backed up, not wanting Moore near her. She focused on her hearing, making sure she wasn't about to be tackled and pulled away by anyone else who might enter the room. "I saw the file and the doctors!" she yelled, pointing a finger at her authority. "You lied to me!" Moore sighed quietly. Avery heard it clearly, along with his heartbeat. She always listened to everyone else's heartbeat. Its pace could reveal secrets. "Who am I?" Avery demanded. Moore stayed silent for a moment. "Tell me now!"

"You were an addict, dying slowly. We saved you," Moore explained. Avery felt sick to her stomach. She grabbed it, but kept the force down.

"I was an experiment to you all!" she yelled. Moore took a step forward. Avery took one back.

"I didn't carry out the procedure," Moore stated. "I only knew about the program and requested a subject for our department."

"Why?!" Avery yelled. Tears were forming in her blank eyes. She felt like a lost and scared child, separated from her mother.

"We wanted to bring real justice to society. We needed you," Moore replied. "but we saved you. Gave you a new life." Avery wanted to scream. Moore could see the anger in her blank eyes, the emotion breaking through the mist.

"No," Avery said. "You made me your weapon. You took my sight and gave me a curse!" Moore took a few steps again, inching closer to Avery. She took a few steps towards the door.

"No Avery, you...you..." but he couldn't find the words. There were no words left to say.

"I've seen so many monsters," Avery said. "But now I know who the real demons are."

Blissful Memories
Damian Perry
Photography and Photoshop

The Bearded Man

Lydia Granholm

His crimes outnumbered his many years of life and he smiled whenever one of his victims' unsuspecting faces crossed his mind. It had been a long and productive life in the city, but it would soon catch up to him. Looking through the last of the boxes that the movers had yet to take out to the truck, he noticed his most prized possession sitting exposed at the top of one of the not yet taped boxes. A scrapbook, which he had learned how to make from watching his mother.

Granted, his was a little different, but it still preserved the memories he held most dear, as had hers. While hers had baby photos of him and his cousins, his had blurry images of people who did not yet know him. Hers had flyers from childhood events, his clips of hair. Hers buttons and paint swatches, his blood stains and torn clothing.

He decided it best if he moved this box himself.

He carried the box out into the crisp air, passing the movers on their way back in.

"You have the address?" he asked one of them.

"Yessir," she replied.

"Alright, I'm going to head out."

She nodded and continued into his old house. He would miss the memories made there. On a better day he might have lured one of the movers down to the hidden room and had some fun, but he just wasn't feeling it today. Having finished the arduous task of fitting yet another box into the backseat of his car he sat down in the driver's seat.

"Can we get going already?" The ancient and as impatient as ever woman in the passenger's seat asked.

"Yes mother," he replied as he started up the car. "The movers will meet us there once they have finished up here; we can leave now."

"Good," she said as she readjusted herself to face away from him, arms still crossed. "I still don't see why we have to go through all this trouble."

"I told you that this was the only job I could find," he said calmly, as he knew she had just grown grumpy with age. "Besides, we will be much happier out there."

"Bullshit," she grumbled. "If you had been better with your money and didn't spend all your time out doing god knows what at all hours of the night."

He didn't react and kept his eyes glued to the road. All his practice for denying his actions to the police, if they ever managed to catch him, came through for him when his mother was in one of these particularly grumpy moods. She never did react to his emotions as a kid, and showing none at all seemed to work wonders for their relationship. Her ramblings no longer mattered to him. Unlike when he had been a child, he was in charge now. If she wanted to rant

about how he spent his money, he couldn't have cared less. At least he wasn't spending it all on booze like she had been doing his whole life.

They drove in silence for the rest of the trip as buildings turned to trees and the wide roads narrowed. They passed signs directing them to the national park that their state was known for, and he turned towards a small dirt road near its entrance labeled "Employees Only."

"Are we nearly there yet?" His mother asked.

"Almost. The house is at the end of the road here."

The gravel cracked beneath the tires as he came to a stop. Before them was a small cabin built into the side of a small hill with part of its stone basement exposed on the lower side. He scratched his beard in contemplation before shutting the car door and picking up his personal box to bring inside.

"Let's see what this shack has to offer," his mother said, and she hobbled angrily towards the front door. He followed her in, placing his keys and box on the kitchen counter. "This is horrible!" he heard her shout from down the hall.

"Well I was expecting it would need some work, it's-"

"Where's the other one," she interrupted. "Where am I supposed to sleep?"

"There should be a bedroom down in the basement," he said, "maybe it is a little nicer." He walked over to a door that looked a little different from the rest, pulling an old key out of his pocket to unlock it. "Here it is."

"Let me see," his mother said, shoving him out of the way and barging down the stairs. "There's nothing down here!" she shouted back up.

The man shut the door behind her, turning the key in the lock and walking back to the box he had brought in with him.

"Dennis!" she shouted, banging on the door. "What the hell is this?! Let me out!"

Ignoring her, he pulled the book out from his box and flipped to a fresh page. Tucked between the back cover and the last page was a photograph that he had been waiting to include for far too long. He cut out the little boy from the image; no need to include him in this, and pasted it to the page. Again he found no joy in the thought of killing today, so there was nothing to do now but wait.

He heard the unmistakable crash of someone falling down the stairs.

"I told you we would be happier out here," Dennis said when the banging finally stopped. Finally, he could smile when he thought of his mother.

Untitled
Lauren Lane
Photography

Sky Came Falling

Kenneth Timper

I remember the day the sky came falling.

It started like any other. I woke up to my father cooking breakfast. He dropped a pan, and I heard it ring throughout our small cabin. Before that day, I had never seen my father. I had not seen anything. I had been blind for as long as I could remember. I was sixteen years old, give or take. My birthday was never certain. My father found me abandoned in the woods when I was a baby, so he took me in as his own. He always told me that was the day he won the lottery.

I had one more week until I could remove the bandage from my right eye and know if the surgery was successful. The doctors told me they could not salvage the left.

I inhaled the crisp winter air and got out of bed. The wood floor felt frigid against my bare feet. I felt around the wall of my room until I found the door, then walked out. I proceeded down the hall, fingering the ridges in the wall until I felt the warmth of the kitchen.

"Good morning, Ellie! I'm sorry if I woke you," my father said cheerfully. "How are you feeling?"

"Fine," I told him. "I've been too excited to sleep."

"I bet. Only one week left and then—"

"I can finally see the snow!" I interrupted, unable to contain my excitement.

"That's right," he laughed. "Now, wash up. Breakfast is ready."

We sat down and ate breakfast together. I listened to the wind howl outside. My father turned on the radio while we ate. The reporter urged people to evacuate from the nearby cities, warning them of the 'blizzard of the century' that was going to pass through. I heard my father sigh.

"Is there something wrong, Dad?"

"I'm worried about my brother," he replied. "Your uncle, Jacob."

"You mean the addict," I scoffed.

"He is sick," he corrected me. "And we should check on him."

"If you say so," I sighed. "Let's hope he hasn't gone off and overdosed under a bridge somewhere."

"Watch it," he said sternly. "Get dressed, Ellie. We're riding into town."

***

The wind roared as it pushed against the car. I felt it rock back and forth as we drove toward the city. We had traveled to see Jacob often, but the ride had never been this treacherous. My father cursed as the car slid on icy patches in the road. The car radio played the emergency broadcast on a loop. My father turned it off. I felt the car slow down and stop. I heard the door on the driver's side open and close. I felt around to my right and gripped the handle and pushed my door open.

I followed my father's footsteps through the dank halls of the apartment complex Jacob lived in. It always smelled terrible, and I always heard people snoring and groaning on the staircase, but it was quiet that day. Even the rats that dwelled in the walls had been silent.

We arrived at Jacob's room, and my father knocked on the door. There was no answer.

"Hey, Jacob!" My father continued to knock. "You in there?"

"He probably already left. Can we go now? It's freezing in here."

My father turned the doorknob, and the door creaked as it opened. An uneasiness fell over me. I paused before following my father inside. He called for Jacob again and tried to turn on the light. The power

had been cut off. I followed my father as we tripped over what felt like trash and broken glass under our shoes. Jacob's place was always a wreck.

My father called for Jacob again, and then he suddenly stopped.

"What's wrong, Dad?" I asked him, but he did not reply. "Seriously, what's going on? Is it Jacob?"

My father inhaled sharply and gulped. He struggled to find the words.

"Jacob is fine," my father stammered. "He's resting now. We should leave him be."

"What do you mean he's resting? Dad, you're scaring me."

"He's fine, Ellie. Let's get going before the storm gets worse."

We walked down the staircase and back to the car. The wind blew violently, and we stepped outside. I held onto my bandage and made sure it stayed on. We got into the car and drove off.

It was quiet for most of the ride. The storm was picking up outside, and my father insisted we go stay with my aunt. She was better equipped for disaster than we were. I was sure my father was thinking of ways to deliver the news about Jacob.

"I'm sorry for what I said, Dad," I finally found the courage to say. "Really, I didn't mean it."

"It's okay, Eleanor. I know you didn't."

My father only addressed me by my full name when something was wrong.

"No one could have known. You aren't to blame." He continued. "Jacob was sick, and he needed help. Your aunt and I, we tried to care for him. But it was ultimately up to him."

I listened intently.

"Jacob tried, he really did." He had to force the words out. "Jacob was strong. But the demons he wrestled with were just too much for him."

"I'm so sorry, Dad."

"Jacob was brave. He had to be brave to reach out to us." His words quivered. "And we had to be brave to love him."

I sat there quietly, and I understood him.

***

The car moved slowly as my father navigated through large patches of snow and ice. He struggled to see through the storm in front of him. The wipers screeched as they dragged back and forth against the windshield. My father assured me that there was nothing to worry about. It was too late.

I felt the road disappear from beneath the car as we entered what I thought was a dirt path. The car accelerated, and I heard my father breathe heavily. He yelled at me to hold on as I felt my side of the car lift and suspend itself in the air briefly. There was a loud creak, and then it flipped over and completed its rotation. We tumbled downhill, and I screamed. Then there was nothing.

A shiver crept up my spine as I woke. I felt a heavy weight pushing against my waist and legs as I tried to stand. I panicked and flailed my arms, desperately feeling what was around. I realized the car had turned upside down. I heard my father cough, and I pushed myself out of the car. My head hurt, and I could not feel my legs. I listened to him, and I crawled over to where he was.

"Dad!" I called out. "Dad, where are you? Are you okay?"

"I'm right here," he wheezed. "I'm fine Eleanor, are you alright? You were so quiet, I was worried."

"I'm okay Dad, where are we?" I said as I moved my hand to feel his face. His glasses were broken, and his forehead felt warm and wet.

"I'm not sure." He continued to cough. "I can see

lights just over the hill, but I don't think I can move."

"I'm so scared, Dad. What are we going to do?" I pushed my head into his chest and cried.

"You have to go uphill and find help, Ellie," he said. "I don't think I can move. I feel sleepy."

I cried louder.

"Listen to me." He found the strength to say. "I'm losing blood. The storm is picking up, and you've got to go now."

"But I can't see, Dad." I cried and plunged my face into his chest. His shirt was wet with blood. "I'm not strong like you or Jacob. I can't do this."

"You can, Eleanor. You are the strongest person I know. And you're just getting started."

I held him close to me and sobbed and begged him not to leave me all alone.

He told me about the day he found me, as he used to before bedtime when I was young.

He coughed, and he told me about how he found me in the woods all alone.

He told me that I was so malnourished that you could see my ribs and my heart beating out of my chest, but that I had the roar of a lion.

He told me about how badly I smelled and how bald my head was and chuckled.

He told me about how he got to the doorstep of the orphanage and looked at me before walking inside.

He told me I was the most beautiful person he had ever met.

He told me that he decided I would be better off blind in a home than blind in an orphanage, and that's why he took me in.

He told me he loved me, then he stopped breathing.

I sat up and held his head against my chest. I rocked back and forth and sobbed and begged God not to take him away. I screamed into the sky. Light peered at me through the bandage as the adhesive began to peel off. I removed the bandage completely and looked at my father for the first and last time. His eyes were a bright shade of brown that looked like honey in the light. I covered them with his eyelids and kissed his forehead and said good-bye. I stood up and saw the light over the snow-covered hills, then I went on.

THE END

Snowed In

Kenneth Timper

The end of the world had just started outside of his front door. The temperature dropped through the floor as he sat still in front of the television. Warnings of disaster interrupted programming he could hardly pay attention to. The shiny yellow walls of his apartment blinded him and erased the apocalypse beyond them from his peripheral vision. The television rang incessantly with alarms accompanied by urges to evacuate. He did not hear them, and he did not hear the reporters who warned everyone of the 'blizzard of the century' one week prior. He was enveloped by the warmth of the yellow walls that surrounded him. The abrasive alarms quickly faded into a soft hum in the background. He was alone, and he was comfortable.

He shifted his gaze from the yellow walls to the series of photographs of him and his parents that were on display against them. Most had fireworks in them and, in most, everyone smiled. He started at the beginning and followed the pictures left to right down the wall. He smiled. When the fireworks and festivity disappeared, uneasiness crept in. He did not notice. Instead, he looked at himself and felt accomplished that he had slimmed down throughout the years. The lights flickered as the storm raged on outside. He continued to smile.

A tree fell somewhere outside and knocked the power out. He strained his eyes to look at the pictures

as the dim light of the gray sky scarcely illuminated his surroundings. He squinted his eyes close together, so he could still make out the details of the last photograph in the arrangement. He closed his eyes and tried to recall the details himself but failed. He dozed off briefly and felt the warmth of the yellow walls consume him again. He twitched curiously as his mouth hung open and he fell asleep.

He remembered sinking into his parents' loveseat and losing himself in the warmth of the lights around him. Blurry bodies danced around the living room carpet as champagne bottles burst and laughter erupted in the kitchen nearby. To him, the kitchen appeared to be miles away. He hoisted himself up from the cushion and struggled to find his balance before he began his walk. He was greeted by pale alien figures as he stumbled into the kitchen. He looked upward at the little chandelier in the room, and its lights became brighter until they blinded him. Talking among the pale alien figures grew louder, and some spoke to him, but he could not make out a discernible phrase. He felt the ice run down his back as his mother resuscitated him in the tub he bathed in as a child. He rose from the water and looked to his right. His mother looked back at him, then she wept.

The chill crept up his spine as he awakened. He noticed the power had been turned off in his dingy apartment and he felt the cold air coming in through the deteriorating walls. His skin started to itch. His joints ached as he forced himself up from his decrepit couch and walked into the kitchenette. He looked through the little window above the sink and got a glimpse of the destruction beyond the walls of his decaying fortress. One by one he started to open all the cabinets in the kitchenette. His skin still itched. The discomfort grew as he scratched. He saw that the cabinets were empty and panicked. He stumbled and tripped in the darkness as he desperately tried to find the bathroom.

The medicine cabinet swung open, and its contents fell onto the floor. He fell along with them and desperately sorted through trash and empty vials in the dark. He felt feverish, his skin burned, and he still scratched. He found the small cardboard box he was looking for and clasped it against his chest as he rushed back to the living room in the dark.

Sweating profusely, he sat down on the old couch. His skin burned, and he struggled to open the cardboard box. He felt around inside of it until the tip of a needle pricked his finger, and he clutched the syringe. He shook violently and rolled up his sleeve to find roughly where the vein was and pushed the needle toward it. He sobbed and prayed it was not empty and firmly pushed the plunger. He gasped. His head slung back as his body contorted and spread itself out on the couch. His head wrapped around the arm of the seat and his mouth hung open. Finally, he stopped itching. He felt paralyzed by the cold. He moved his eyes upward onto the crooked pictures that resided on the dingy yellow walls. He did not recognize the frail boy in the last photograph, sad for him. He looked scared.

He listened to the wind howl and stared out the window until night fell. His mouth hung open and he twitched curiously on the couch and nodded off. He stopped twitching and the storm raged on outside.

Do You Love Me Now?

Kassie Burton

She looks at the welts on her skin. Her mouth tastes of iron and bleeds of crimson. The chains on her wrists and ankles keep her from falling off the wall she hangs from. Her hair is tangled and matted, and flies swarm around her from the stench. She decays before her very eyes. His very eyes and he loves it.

2 months ago

The sound of "Flawless" by Dorothy awakes Clara James one autumn morning. She groans but awakes anyway to start her day. As she starts to get up, she notices her collarbone starts to tingle but doesn't think anything of it. After brushing her teeth, taking a shower, and getting dressed for school, she heads downstairs to what she thought a usual breakfast in the James' house would be.

She was wrong.

As she sat down to eat her waffles, she notices everything is quiet. She looks up to see her mother softly crying, with her father consoling her. Clara's older brother Marcus looks towards her with anticipation.

"Wha?" She asked, chewing her waffles.

"Have you gotten it yet?" Marcus asked.

"Gotten what, you weirdo," Clara continues to eat, and Marcus rolls his eyes.

"You know, what everyone gets on their sixteenth birthday," He clicks his tongue and starts to eat his breakfast when it finally clicks.

Clara looks up from her breakfast in horror as her collarbone starts to tingle again. Her mother, still sobbing across the table, gets up and runs into her bedroom at the announcement. Her father walks over to Clara and kisses her forehead and whispers, *"Happy birthday, kiddo."* and walks slowly to the bedroom. When the door clicks into place, Clara sighs and lays her head down on the counter.

It was October 2nd. The day her life ends.

Marcus gets up and rubs Clara's shoulders in comfort, but soon removes them and starts to shake her.

"Well?" He questioned. Clara shoved him off her.

"My collarbone is tingling, but nothing has appeared yet," She muttered.

"Are you scared?" He asked.

"I didn't even remember my own birthday. How am I supposed to deal with the fact that I'm going to have someone's name on my body for the rest of my life?" She angrily replied.

"Well-" he interrupted.

Ice Petals

Kassie Burton
Photography

"Don't answer that. I'm going to school," Clara pushes her plates aside, grabs her bag, and heads out the door.

When she was two, the government decided to eliminate the need for free will. At least, when it came to love. People were no longer allowed to choose who they could be with. The choice is made for them by a computer. Citizens sign their names to a document in school when they are fifteen, and the results appear on their body when they are sixteen. The pair is expected to be married when they are twenty-one, however, that doesn't always happen.

As Clara approaches the school, the pain on her collarbone gets worse. Black ink starts to materialize on her porcelain skin. Each letter forms as Clara runs into the building, past her friends, and bursts into the bathroom to check the name that will change her life.

Brandon Carmichael

She knew Brandon. He was in her Biology class; he seems nice enough, but she didn't exactly believe in forced love. Clara sighs and fixes her shirt so that no one could see the new addition to her skin. She walks out of the bathroom and to her locker to grab her books. When she looks up to dial her combination; Clara notices her locker is completely decorated in party string and birthday cards.

"SURPRISE!!!" Her best friends, Robbie and Jason yelled.

"You guys are the best," Clara hugged each of her friends.

"Well, it is your sixteenth birthday. We have to treat you like the queen you are, correct?" Jason winked.

Jason became the big brother figure in her life after Marcus graduated. He stepped up to the plate and protected Clara without ever needing to be asked. Robbie, on the other hand, was her best friend for life. He treated her with respect and always trusted her. Clara secretly hoped that Robbie's name would be on her skin, but because they didn't share a birthday, she lost hope.

"So, did you get it?" Jason asked. Clara shifts her eyes.

"We don't need to talk about it," Clara mumbles.

"Come on, everyone gets their name on their sixteenth birthday. Who'd you get?" Jason persists, and before he could continue, Robbie interjects.

"Why don't we head to English now before we're late?" Robbie points towards the classroom and Jason gives up in a huff.

"Fine," Jason pouts but walks inside the classroom.

"Thank you, Robbie." Clara smiles.

"Of course. Shall we?" Robbie puts his arm out for Clara to grab.

"We shall," She grabs his arm and they both head into the classroom.

As the day passes on, Clara finds herself forgetting about her love predicament. At the end of the day, Jason and Robbie promise to meet up tomorrow to go to the skate park and everyone goes their separate ways. When Clara gets home, her brother is sitting at the kitchen table doing homework, and her parents are nowhere to be found. Marcus looks up when he hears the door close and immediately smiles at his sister.

"Ah, there's the birthday girl. Did you get it?" Marcus smirked, and Clara slammed her stuff down.

"If you ask me about this stupid name again, I swear I will hurt you," Clara glared at her brother.

"I honestly didn't mean to make you angry C. Mom and dad are freaking out about you growing up, but honestly the name doesn't matter," Marcus moves to kiss Clara on her forehead and goes back to his seat.

"You want something to eat? The 'rents are out for the afternoon," He asked.

Clara sighs but nods her head. Marcus gets up and gets out the recipe for Blueberry Pancakes. The aroma of blueberries and syrup soon fill the kitchen, and Clara makes groans when they are done. She takes in the sweetness of the pancake and the tension from the day immediate falls from her body.

"Thanks, Marcus," She hugs her brother when she's done eating.

"Of course. I know I rag on you a little bit, 'Clara glowers at him' okay I rag on you a lot. I'm your big brother, it's my job to do so. I don't mean any harm it in though," He shrugs.

"I know you don't mean to. It just gets on my nerves," Clara smiles.

"Well, I'm going to do it for as long as you're alive so get used to it C," Marcus ruffles her hair and she pushes him off her.

"Whatever. I'm going upstairs to do my homework. Let me know if mom or dad ever get home,"

Clara puts her plates in the sink and climbs up the stairs, hearing a faint 'roger that' in the background. She goes on her computer and starts her assignments.

As the sun starts to set, and Clara finishes her last assignment, she gets a notification from her phone.

Hey, Clara. I know this seems weird, but I got your number from a friend in Bio. I just want to say happy birthday since I never got the chance to talk to you today. Also, can we talk about, well... you know what?

~ Brandon

Clara is put off from the forwardness in the text. She was planning on avoiding the whole situation entirely. However, she guessed it was finally time to face the music and toughen up. She opens her phone and attempts to text him back.

Hi... Brandon. Thank you, happy birthday to you as well. I know this is extremely weird, however, do you honestly think we could make it as a couple? I mean I don't exactly believe in "forced love."

She waits a few minutes before the reply is sent.

Thanks, and who knows? Never hurts to give it a try?

Does he want to date her?

You honestly believe in this crap?

Why not? Who does it hurt? Just go on one date with me. I promise it will be a night you will never forget. ;)

Honestly, Clara knows there is nothing that Brandon can do to change her mind, however, she will play his game.

For now.

Alright, fine. How is seven pm tomorrow? The Twisted Fork?

Seven is great. See you then. ;)

Clara turns her cell phone off and starts to get ready for bed. She goes to sleep that night troubled, not sure of what will come in the morning.

The next day goes by in a blur for Clara as the date starts to approach her. Nightfall appears, and she starts to get ready. Before she can leave, someone raps on her door.

"Hey, kiddo, it's dad. Can I talk to you before you leave?" He pleads.

Clara lets him in and sits on her bed in exasperation.

"This is the first time you have spoken to me since you found out," She sighed.

"I know, I'm sorry, I was trying to calm your mother down," He shrugged.

"Why is she taking this 'meant to be' thing so hard?" She asked.

"Your mom just wants you to be happy with someone who you chose to be with. She never actually told you this, but she and I weren't always supposed to be with each other," He rubbed his face and sighed.

"You and mom are..."

"Yes," he interrupted, "Mom and I are 'meant to be's as you call it. But she didn't always love me. And she's worried you will feel the same way."

Clara finally understood.

"Alright, I'll be gentle on her. And I guess I should be gentle on Brandon too, yeah?" She asked.

"Try to be okay kiddo. I love you, be safe tonight and be back by eleven," He kisses her forehead and slips out the door.

Clara smiles at the touch and leaves her room. She gets into her car and drives down to the Twisted Fork. When she gets there, Brandon is waiting for her near the entrance.

"Hi, Bella,"

Brandon kisses Clara on the hand, which she immediately pulls away.

"Hi, Brandon," She grimaces.

Brandon frowns but tries to not take offense to the action.

"Let's head inside, shall we?"

They walk inside the restaurant and soon enough, get a table. A waiter pops by to take their order.

"What can I get for the lady?" He questions.

"A salad and water are okay for right now," she said.

"How about for the gentleman?"

"I'm good with a steak and coke, man."

"Alright, I will be right back with both."

He walks to the kitchen to grab the items. While they wait for the waiter to come back, Brandon makes a move for Clara's hand, but Clara moves her hand away at the last moment.

"Why do you keep pushing your hand away? Don't you see that we are meant to be Clara? Don't you love me?"

Brandon's eyes turn from a calm oceanic blue to a stormy seafoam. He looks at Clara with a fixated stare, and Clara gets nervous.

"I honestly don't understand why you believe in this crap. I agree to go on this date with you, and you act as if we should be married! Get this through your brain, I do NOT love you. I will NEVER love you and you cannot change my mind!" Clara yelled in front of the restaurant.

The dining room is silent. Onlookers in the restaurant look at Brandon in either sympathy or disgust. Clara then sighs, goes through her purse and throws down twenty dollars for her half of the dinner.

"I'm done with this,"

With those final words, Clara storms out of the restaurant and heads to her car. As she slides the key into the lock, she is struck from behind with a rock on the ground. Her body falls to a heap and she is caught by Brandon.

"You will regret ever messing with me..."

He murmurs and takes her into the night.

Present

She looks at the welts on her skin. Her mouth tastes of iron and bleeds of crimson. The chains on her wrist and ankles keep her from falling off the wall she hangs from. Her hair is tangled and matted, as flies swarm around her from the stench. She decays before her very eyes. His very eyes and he loves it.

She spends two months on the wall, her skin burning raw as it cuts deeper into her. Welts from previous beatings ache at her back and arms. She starts to spasm and shake until she takes her last breath as he says...

"Do you love me now?"

Will You Forgive Me?

Rachael Thomas

"Luke, if you don't stop bothering your sister and sit down, you won't get any dessert!" Amelia said. She looked over her shoulder at her two children. Her five-year-old son was standing up in his chair, attempting to pull his older sister's hair. Amelia continued to stir the strings of pastas noodles, which were boiling in a large pot in front of her. The warm steam from the pot stroked her face.

"Make him stop!" Amelia's daughter Ruby cried. Luke was now trying to climb onto the table to reach his sister's brown locks.

"Lucas, if you don't listen to your mother and sit down right now you will be sent to your room!" a deep voice rang out. Immediately, Luke retreated back into his chair, his cheeks turning red, as his gaze went down to his feet under the table. Amelia smiled, thankful that Seb had stepped in and helped her. She then turned off the stove, ready to pour the hot water out of the pot and serve dinner.

Amelia placed the bowl of pasta on the table, before sitting down across from her husband. "Let's say grace," Seb stated. The family of four reached for each other's hands, making a circle around the table. They each bowed their heads. "Close both eyes, Luke," Seb said, knowing his son would have one eyes open. Luke obeyed, squeezing both his eyes closed. "We thank you Lord for our family," Seb began. "And the love and food you have given us here today. We ask that you continue to watch over us and keep us safe. We ask this in the name of your son, Jesus Christ. Amen."

"And that I make a good grade on my test Friday," Rudy quickly said. Amelia and Seb both began to laugh, amused and proud of their daughter. The family separated hands, the food now blessed and ready to be devoured. Seb began to served Luke's plate, knowing his son would scoop too many pasta noodles at once and end up dumping half of them on the floor.

"Think God heard my prayer, Mommy?" Ruby asked.

"I'm sure he did Honey," Amelia replied. "You make sure to study hard now." Ruby nodded in agreement. She then served her plate, while her brother had already started to eat. Amelia and Seb served themselves too, the bowl holding the pasta now half empty. The room grew quiet, all four members of the family satisfying their hunger.

Amelia chewed slowly as her eyes danced around the table, landing on each family member for a few seconds. Ruby was sitting up straight, carefully twirling the noodles around her fork before putting it in her mouth. Luke, attempting to imitate his sister, wasn't as graceful. He seemed to always twirl too many noodles around the fork, resulting in the strands loosely hanging off the utensil or causing him to put too much in his mouth at once. Amelia's eyes then meet Seb's. Their gazes almost seemed to speak to each other's, as though the two had a telepathic connection. A smile formed on Seb's face, Amelia mirroring the act. That was when they both heard a knock at the front door.

Everyone turned and looked in the direction of the tall, wooden door that stood at the front of the house. It was just around the corner of the dining room and stairs. They had not been any expecting guests. The evening was not very late though. It was dark outside, but the time was only a little past six-thirty. "Who's at

the door?" Luke mumbled, his mouth full of mashed up pasta.

"Luke, don't talk with your mouth full. It's rude," Amelia addressed to her son. Luke closed his mouth. He chewed his remaining food and swallowed.

"I'll go check," Seb said, placing his silverware on the table and standing up. He headed out of the room, and out of sight, to answer the door. Amelia heard him unlocked the deadbolt on the top of the door first, before unlocking the knob as well. Seb then pulled the door open. It made a slight creaking sound in the process. "Evening..." he started to say but then went silent.

"Seb? Everything okay?" Amelia called out to her husband. Luke was still gulping down his dinner, while Ruby had her fork hanging in midair. A single noodle slipped form it and fell back on her plate. There was no reply. "Sebastian?" Amelia continued.

"Amelia..." Seb replied. She felt relief to hear her husband's voice. "You may want to come here... for a moment please." Amelia's eyebrows arch down, her eyes beginning to squint. Why did she need to come to the door? However, she wouldn't know the answer unless she stood up and went over. She placed her silverware down and pushed her chair out from under the table.

"Who is it Mommy?" Ruby asked, also beginning to push her chair out.

"Stay here Ruby. You too Luke. Eat your dinner," Amelia commanded. Ruby turned back to her plate and resumed eating. Luke's lips slightly puckered out, a small pouty expression on his face, but he did as he was told. Amelia turned the corner, before stopping in her tracks. Standing in the door way was an elderly man, looking to be in his sixties. He was slightly hunched over, making him look shorter than his actual height. His face was wrinkled, and the lower half of it was covered with a tangled, gray beard. His eyes were a light brown and looked tired from all the years of sights they had seen. Greasy, gray hair poked out from under his black cap, the hat appearing worn out. His brown jacket and pants were worn too. Dirt covered his shoes, which were practically falling apart. Seb's hands were in his pockets, a concerned look on his face. The old man smiled at Amelia.

"Hey Pumpkin," the old man said. Amelia crossed her arms, staying calm.

"Dad..." she replied. There was a stern look on her face. Her father only continued to smile, a slight look of worry and sympathy appearing in his eyes.

"Uh... it's nice to see you John," Seb said, attempting to break the awkward moment between his wife and father-in-law. "I hope things had been going well for you."

"I'm sure things have been just fine for him," Amelia interrupted. "And I'm sure he was just getting ready to go for the evening." Amelia started to move towards the door, preparing to close it.

"Oh, I'm so sorry if I interrupted anything," John said. "But I wanted to come by to talk to you all. I've really missed seeing you two, and Ruby and Luke as well." Seb bit the inside of his mouth, but not hard enough to make it bleed. He cocked his head to one side and brushed a small strand of blonde hair away from his forehead.

"Oh, I don't know John. We're in the middle of..." but he was immediately cut off by his wife.

"You leaving," Amelia said. "We are right in the middle of you leaving." Amelia reached for the door knob. Seb stepped back, not willing to get in the way

of his wife. "It was nice to see you again Dad, but now it's time for you to go." She began to close the door. John raised his hand, stopping her.

"Amelia, I really need to speak to you all. It's very serious," John said. He slightly pushed against the door, opening it a little. Amelia resisted closing it again, but kept her hands on the knob and the back of the door. "Please? It's really important," John continued. The worry in his glare had now formed into desire. "Please Baby?"

Seb placed his hand on Amelia's shoulder. She turned to look at her husband. "Amelia, maybe we should just listen," Seb said. Amelia pulled a breath of air into her nostrils and then released it in a frustrated puff. "Just give it a chance. Please?" Seb continued. Amelia looked back at her father. The man smiled again, revealing his cooked teeth. They were also stained. Amelia signed and pulled the door open.

"Seb, why don't you and the kids finish dinner upstairs in the playroom? Maybe watch a few minutes of a tv show while you all eat," Amelia recommended.

"Oh, I wanted to talk to Seb and the kids too," John replied. He stepped into the house, some of the mud of his shoes falling onto the clean floor under him. Amelia crossed her arms again, as Seb closed and locked the front door.

"No," Amelia said. "You can talk to me, Dad. Just me. In the living room," Amelia replied. She wasn't about to let her father take hold of the authority in her home. "Let's head in there now."

Seb proceeded to return to the kitchen, telling the kids they would finish dinner upstairs and could watch a bit of TV. The news was met with excited squeals. They grabbed their plates and begin to charge up the stairs. Seb followed with his plate in his hand, making a quick glance at Amelia before he disappeared with the kids. Amelia knew the expression on Seb's face, in a way, was telling her to call him if she needed anything. John carefully sat on the tan colored couch, before looking up at Amelia. She could tell he was expecting her to sit next to him, but instead she headed for the large arm chair across from him.

John coughed, clearing his through. Amelia could see dark ash under his finger nails. Her father reached into his pocket. "You can't smoke in my home," Amelia stated. John stop rummaging through his pocket for a minute. His lower slip had slightly dropped. He then closed his mouth and pulled out a tissue from his pocket. John raised it to his mouth and coughed into it. He then wiped his nose.

"I decided to quit the other day," John replied. Amelia didn't respond.

"Okay, then," John continued. He balled up the tissue and put it back in his pocket. He coughed again and looked around the living room for a moment, admiring it's set up. Multiple chairs stood around the couch, while a coffee table sat in the middle. A large TV was hanging on the back way, the screen dark. The place appeared spotless too, no dust or dirt found anywhere.

"Well Amelia, I hope you and Seb have been doing well." Amelia nodded in response. "And Ruby and Luke of course. Are they doing fine in school? What grades are they in now?"

"Ruby is in third grade and Luke just started kindergarten," Amelia said. "They are both doing fine." There was annoyance in her voice. John took on his cap, his messy, uncombed hair underneath. The oil in it glistened against the light from a nearby lamp. He placed his hat on the coffee table.

"I'm sorry I don't remember. It's great they are both doing well," John finished. Amelia locked her fingers together, setting her hands in her lap.

"Cut the crap Dad. What do you have to tell me? I'd like to get back to dinner with my husband and kids." John looked down at the floor. His cheeks turned a cherry color. He rubbed the side of his face, stroking part of his beard in the process.

"I'm sorry Pumpkin. I'm promise to start…" but he was quickly silenced.

"Don't start making promises," Amelia said. "You never keep them." John signed. There was now a sense of shame in the room.

"Please Amelia. Just listen to me. I have important news." Amelia rolled her eyes. It wasn't like she had never heard those same words before. Her father was like a broken record, repeating himself over and over again. When was someone going to take the vinyl off the player and start playing a new one?

"Fine, go on then," Amelia stated. John swallowed a bit nervous. Amelia's eyes drew up to the ceiling, waiting for her father to tell her his important news. She could hear the television on upstairs, a rerun of the kids' favorite show playing. It was an episode Amelia could quote by heart, having watched it with them time after time. John started to speak, but retreated again, unsure of how to start the conversation. "Dad," Amelia said. John's head shot up.

"Amelia, I've decided to go to rehab," John managed to say. He leaned back against the couch after saying it, as if it had taken almost all of his energy to speak. Amelia only stayed silent. John had expected that to be her reaction. "I know you've heard it before… well… things like it, but this isn't like the other times. I'm really going to do it," he finished.

Amelia leaned her cheek against her hand and rolled her eyes. "Don't you believe me?" John asked. "I'm checking in on Friday. The facility of is great place. Nice people, good atmosphere, and…" but Amelia interrupted.

"Are you done Dad?" she said. John felt surprised. However, he knew he shouldn't have been.

"Pumpkin, please listen," he said. He straightened his posture, no longer slumped on the couch.

"Please don't call me that," Amelia stated. John knew he deserved her saying that to him. He had lost the right to call her Pumpkin long ago. "If you honestly just came here to tell me you're going to try to do better than you can leave," Amelia demanded. "I know you're eager to get your hands on a glass and you're not going to find it here." John's shoulder slightly sank.

The two stayed quiet for a moment, before John decided to reply. "I haven't had any for a week." Amelia shrugged her shoulders. "I got rid of all the bottles and haven't bought any more. I quit going to bars too," John continued. "It's been a change, but so far everything has been going smoothly." Amelia only shrugged again. "And I quit smoking yesterday too." Instantly, Amelia stood up from her chair, startling her father again.

"Okay, so you quit drinking and smoking and you're planning on checking into rehab. You came here tonight to tell me all this for what reason exactly? Now please go," Amelia said. She pointed at the front door, gesturing for her father to get up and leave. John didn't move.

"Amelia, I understand your reaction, and I'll let you get back to Seb and the kids," John replied. Amelia felt warm, her anger beginning to stew inside her.

Why couldn't her dad just leave and move on with his business already? "And I'm not asking for you to be there for me, but there is one thing I do have of ask of you." Amelia's face turned crimson, while her forehead wrinkled. John swallowed, knowing the tension was going to be unavoidable. "Amelia.... I'd... I'd like to ask for your forgiveness."

Amelia's hand dropped, softly slapping the side of her thigh. Her eyes widen, as she sarcastically laughed. "You've got to be joking?" she commented. The urge to raise her voice was pushing against her lips. But she kept her volume controlled, not wanting the kids to hear her yell at her father.

"No, I'm very serious," John said. His daughter's question had been rhetorical though. "It's a step in my recovery. I've been asking everyone."

Amelia placed her hands on her hips and leaned on her right foot. "Like who?" she asked. She was ready for another laugh.

"I asked Austin and Jenny last week," John said. He took the balled-up tissue out of his pocket again. He unfolded it and whipped his nose for a second time. It had started to run. Amelia began to laugh again.

"Austin and Jenny forgave you?" she said, amused.

"Yes, they did. I'm going to ask your mother tomorrow," John said. He looked around for a trashcan to throw away the tissues. He found one right next to the couch.

"And now you want mine?" Amelia stated.

"Yes, of course," John said. "It would really help me greatly."

Amelia shifted the weight of her right foot, now balancing it between both of her feet. She slightly shook her head. "No," she said. John's eyes looked away from her for a moment, before returning to their original place.

"I understand how you feel, Amelia, but it really would help me with my recovery," John explained. He rubbed his hands against each other anxiously.

"No, you don't understand know how I feel. You don't understand how any of us felt," Amelia replied. John knew she was right. "And now you come to my home and ask for my forgiveness?" John signed quietly to himself.

"Please, it would help greatly," John repeated.

Amelia took a step towards the coffee table, the piece of furniture a wall between her and her father. "You want forgiveness?" Amelia said, her voice growing a bit louder. She hoped Seb would turn the television's volume up a bit and close the door to the play room. Ruby and Luke didn't need to hear the conversation. "I'm surprised. You've never wanted anything else but alcohol."

John's face fell into his hands. He ran his fingers down, pulling his lower eyelids open for a few seconds, before they snapped backup to cover the lower part of his eyeballs. They were red and veiny from exhaustion. "Well, I guess I deserved that. But things have begun to change. Honest," John replied.

Amelia, now incredibly frustrated, let out a grunt. "You never wanted anything else before, so why would you want it now?" she replied.

"Amelia, please listen. I really..." but Amelia cut him off again.

"No, you listen," she demanded, as if she was disciplining her father like one of her children. A scared and saddened expression appeared on John's face. "For years, you spent your time in and out at bars or wobbling around the house with a wine bottle in your hand. And now you want something other

than a drink?" Amelia said.

"Well, there were other things that were and still are important to me too," John stated. He leaned forward, but stayed seated.

Amelia laughed for the third time. "Like what? Mom? Austin and Jenny? Me?" she said. Her strict tone was now slowly transitioning into anger. "Is that why you always came home drunk or hungover? Or why you were always going out to see how many Long Island Ice Teas you could chug down before passing out?"

"Amelia, for so long I didn't think about what I was doing to you four. But I now underst..." but Amelia still wouldn't let him finish.

"Don't you ever tell me you knew what we were going through! You didn't understand it when you were at home, or when you were out, or even after Mom finally kicked you out of the house. And you still don't understand it now!" Amelia said, her now voice loud. She heard a door upstairs close. She thanked Seb in her thoughts, and imagined he was now picking up the tv remote and turning up the volume.

"Mom was always stressed because she had three kids at home to take care of, and a job to pay bills we could barely afford, because you could never keep a job and kept blowing money at bars and liquor stores. And whenever you came home, she would send us to our rooms to hide us from your intoxicated behavior. One day, I finally saw you drunk and then decided to quit hiding and help keep Austin and Jenny from seeing the horrors that were present in our home," Amelia replied. She could see a slight shine in John's eyes.

"That only lasted so long though. I'll never forget the day Jenny asked me why you were in the bathroom throwing up and how I had to lie by saying you had the flu," Amelia admitted. John's mouth dropped open, the man horrified by the story he had never heard until now.

"I didn't know..." he said. He was unsure of what to tell his daughter, the well holding his words having dried.

"Then I realized I had to do more to help Mom, other than just making sure Austin and Jenny didn't see you drunk," Amelia explained. She had started to pace a few steps across the floor. She would then turn around and pace a few more back, repeating the short walk over and over. "I made their lunches for them and helped them with homework, even when I had my own to do. I barely had time hang out with my friends. In high school I couldn't play sports after the day was over and I had to work all the time on weekends to bring in some revenue for us," Amelia said.

"Gosh, Amelia..." John stated. He regretted his words instantly.

"After you were kicked out and the divorce was finalized, things were still hard. I was taking classes at the nearest community college, trying to get a degree, while Mom was still struggling. She had to keep working long hours every night. Meanwhile, Austin started acting like a stupid teenager, and Mom and I were both trying to keep Jenny from following him into trouble. We finally got him to stop after the police brought him home one night with beer on his breath. We weren't about to have another drunk on our hands." Amelia could feel her heart pounding in her chest, the organ acting like it was going to explode. A tear escaped John's left eye.

"I'm... I'm so sorry Amelia. I never wanted any of you to endure such pain," John explained. He wiped the tear from his eye before it could reach and get lost in his beard.

"No!" Amelia cried. "All you wanted to do was to drink. All day and all night, no matter how many times you threw up, or got arrested, or neglected your own wife and children. You were never there for us!"

John stood up, but didn't step out from the other side of the coffee table. "I never wanted to neglect you all..." he said. Another tear ran down his cheek. This time it was from his right eye.

"Well you did!" Amelia screamed. She knew Seb and the kids could probably hear her loud and clear. Seb was probably thinking of a way to drown her out even more or maybe attempt to explain to the kids why their mother was beginning to yell. He would definitely tell them to not worry. "You were never there to kiss your wife when you came home! You were never there to read Jenny a story and tuck her into bed!" There was now an appearance of heartbreak in Amelia's voice, her anger becoming sadness. Tears were beginning to form in her eyes, but she fought to hold them back, unlike her father.

"You weren't there to throw a ball in the park for Austin to hit." Amelia paused, catching her breath for a moment. John waited in silence. Amelia gulped before speaking again. "You weren't there to walk me down the isle and give me away." One small tear finally escaped her eye. She let it run down her cheek and fall to the floor. "You weren't there to be a husband, or a father, or even a grandfather. And you aren't here to be any of those now."

John looked away from her, his gazed falling down onto his cap on the table. He slowly picked it up and gently sat it back on his head. Tears were streaming from his eyes. None of them dripped to the floor, all consumed in his facial hair. "Amelia..." he said. His daughter's eyes were red and her face was burnt from crying. "I'm sorry," he said. Amelia only pointed to the door.

"Get out," she said. The anger in her voice had returned.

"Amelia..." John said.

"Get out, right now," Amelia repeated. Her nose was now running, clear mucus touching her upper lip. She didn't both wipe it away. John slowly shuffled over to the door. He unlocked it and pulled it open. He stood there for a moment, before turning to look back at his daughter. Her back was turned to him.

"Amelia..." he said. He had spoken her name so many times that evening. Amelia wished he would just leave. "I'm sorry for what I did. I'm sorry I was never there." Amelia didn't respond. She had no more words to say, having spoken everything she had bottled up for years. "I'm checking in around nine in the morning. The place is called Second Chance. It's not too far from here. I'm going on Friday, as I mentioned earlier," John said. Amelia still ignored her father, trying to hold in her remaining tears. "Amelia..." he said. She was so tired of him speaking to her. "I love you Pumpkin." John then stepped outside the house and closed the door behind him. He walked down the driveway and headed off in to the night.

Amelia began to whimper. She fell back down into the chair and covered her face. She heard the door upstairs open and expected to hear a cluster of footsteps against the stairs next, but she only heard one pair. Seb reached the bottoms of the stairs, a look of sympathy on his face. The loud volume of the tv could be heard, the open door letting the sound escape and pollute the surrounding area. Seb approached his wife, slowly leaning down to her level. He reached forward and wrapped his arms around Amelia. She proceeded to lay her head on his shoulder, wetting his shirt with her tears and mucus. Seb slowly began to rubbed her upper back, as he quietly made shushing noises with his lips.

John stood outside the rehab center, looking at the tall building. It was white and seemed to glow as the sun beat down on it. Its name was written across its front in bold, blue letters. Rows of colorful flowers were planted in a small garden, located right next to the door of the center. They gave off a sense of warmth and welcome to anyone who walked by them. John smiled nervously.

An imagine of a tall, wine bottle flashed in John's mind. Its sleek shape seemed to catch his attention. John knew that once he brought his lips to the top of it, he would be filled with the taste of its contents. It always managed to overcome his mind and senses, yet the sensation of it was only more and more desirable with every sip. Perhaps a cigarette would be nice too. John shook his head, pushing away his thoughts. "No," he said to himself. He lifted his head high and began to walk towards the center.

"Dad..." he heard someone say. John stopped in his tracks. He turned around slowly, only to see his daughter. Her eyes were still filled with sorrow, having not changed since he last saw her a few days earlier. John smiled. "Hey Pumpkin," he said nervously. Amelia walked towards him, before she stretched out her arms and pulled her father into an embrace. John didn't know how to react at first, his daughter having not hugged him in years. But knowing he should never take moments like this one for granted, he slowly hugged her back.

"Daddy," Amelia said.

"Yes?" John replied. Amelia pulled back, facing her father, yet remaining in his arms. John reached up with one hand, catching a small tear that was dripping from her left eye.

"I forgive you."

Solemn

Kassie Burton
Photography

Prose

In life there are days that require more of you than others

Lauren Lane

There will be days that you are emotionally, mentally, and physically unstable

There are days where you just completely break down, sobbing on the bathroom floor

And that's ok,

There are others where you get so frustrated and ill-minded where you just want to punch the ever loving shit out of the wall

And that's ok

There are also days where you are happy beyond all measure and you don't want the day to end

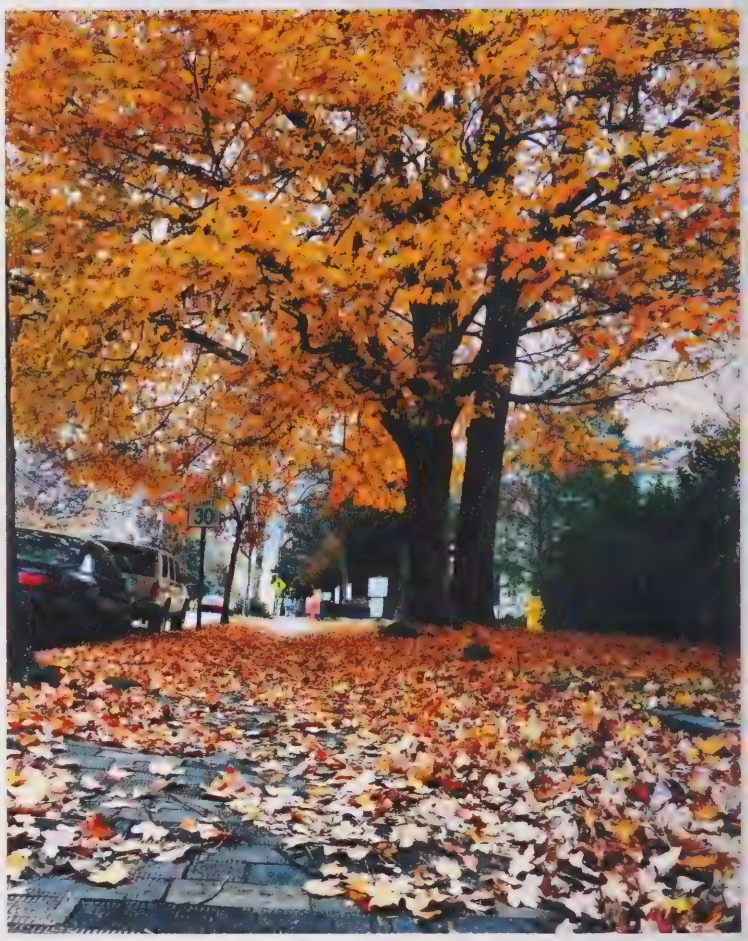
And that's ok

In life you will constantly have an ever loving balance of these days: the bland, the bad, and the breathtaking.

In these days you take them one at a time whatever is thrown your way, be determined to get through the rough and remember to slow down and enjoy the blissful ones

You will make it through this ever loving roller coaster called life

You just need to take it one step at a time



Untitled

Lauren Lane
Photography

Kuperberg's "Deactivated"

Kassie Burton

ENTER STAGE LEFT

MARK WALKS ON TO THE STAGE WITH HIS LAPTOP AND SITS DOWN.

A SINGLE SPOTLIGHT IS ON HIM.

V.O.

"You have confirmed your selection to deactivate your Facebook account. Hey, I just remembered – you know who else might miss you on Facebook? Your girlfriend, Sarah Werner."

MARK LOOKS DOWN AT THE LAPTOP PERPLEXED AND WORRIED.

V.O.

"You have confirmed your selection to deactivate your Facebook account. It's funny – you spend a lot more time looking at Rebecca Feinberg's photo albums then the photo albums of your actual girlfriend Sarah Werner. A lot more."

"It's just sitting in our storage banks. Who knows what happens when things get deactivated. Probably nothing, but do you really want to take that chance?"

MARK STARTS TO SWEAT AND BITES HIS NAILS IN NERVOUSNESS.

HE GETS UP FROM HIS SEAT AND STARTS TO PACE, ONLY TO SIT BACK DOWN AGAIN.

V. O.

"I think you accidently confirmed your selection to deactivate your account again. Why don't we go back and forget this ever happened? Free pass."

MARK STARTS TO PACE AGAIN. HE GETS VISIBLY UPSET.

THE SPOTLIGHT STARTS TO DIM.

V.O.

"Do I really need to remind you about Lake Tahoe last year? Do I really need to mention that you told Drew over Facebook chat that you 'made a big mistake and hooked up with rebecca in lake tahoe!' and Drew advised you to 'just play it cool and don't tell any1 especially sarah?'"

MARK PANICS AND GRIPS AT HIS CHEST. BUT ULTIMATELY, DEACTIVATES HIS ACCOUNT.

THE SPOTLIGHT GROWS WEAKER ON MARK.

V.O.

"You've confirmed your selection to deactivate your account yet again. And here is what I've done: I've posted your PIN number to your Facebook status. I've sent your Gchat logs to Sarah, and I've sent those Snapchat pictures of your torso to Rebecca. I really hope you're happy with all of your decisions. I really am. Best of luck, man. See you in hell."

MARK SLAMS THE LAPTOP ON THE GROUND IN ANGER, BREAKING IT.

HE GRIPS AT HIS CHEST AND FALLS TO THE GROUND, CRYING.

THE SPOTLIGHT DIMS COMPLETELY ENGULFING THE STAGE TO DARKNESS.

END OF SCENE

Clouded Ambitions

Damian Perry
Photography and Photoshop

MLK Speech

Christian Branch

Dear Dr. Martin,

There are many words that I could give to show my appreciation for the legacy you built on Earth. I come humbled and really thankful for your work and dedication to making sure that my generation, that we may have a future. A future transformed in Character not in Color. A future transformed in Love not in Hate. Thank you for being the voice when others could not. Thank you for showing me that my blackness is not my weakness but it is my power, my weapon, my treasure. Thank you for the many sleepless nights and overbearing mornings you continued to fight. Through blood and many tears thank you for bearing the burden that many of us could not face. Thank you for not surrendering to injustice, but for rising above it. Thank you for leaving a mark that no man can erase but that every man can continually carry forward. Thank you for demonstrating what peace and unity should be. It is because of you, Dr. King, I can surely say our world glows a little bit brighter. It is because of you I can now enjoy life with all people from many walks of life. Never forgotten, always cherished. Rest in power, Rest in Love, Rest in Eternal Peace. From a young king to a king.

Forever grateful,

God bless you Dr. King

The Monster in the Basement
(Quote Prompt)

Lydia Granholm

Victor and Janna sat in front of the television screen, as they did every Saturday, watching the colorful characters whiz around a digital track.

"I'm finally going to beat you!" Victor shouted from his position in first place.

"No you aren't," Janna said assuredly.

"You're in third!" Victor continued to shout. "You just can't stand to be wrong, can you? There's no way you'll win thi-"

He hesitated as his car, and every car around him, briefly swerved out of control as the sky flashed with lighting. Every car, that is, except for the one in third, which was now quickly approaching the finish line he had longed for the entire day.

"Dammit!" he shouted, throwing his controller to the floor, which responded with an unearthly growl. Temporarily distracted from his defeat, he turned to Janna. "Jan, what was that sound?"

"What sound?" Janna asked. The growl shook the floor more loudly this time, as though in response.

"That! Is it the boiler malfunctioning or something? Is it about to explode?"

"It's probably a dragon or a monster," Janna replied as she nonchalantly poked through menu screens.

Victor laughed. "I'm sure it's just the boiler. Didn't you say your dad tried fixing it a week ago?" He walked out of the room as if to investigate and Janna reluctantly followed as he trudged down to the basement door.

"Where's your imagination?" Janna said jokingly. "Maybe it's a walrus or an alien."

"It's definitely the boiler," Victor said, "There's nothing else that could make that sound."

"It's not the boiler," Janna said again.

"Man screw you," Victor said, almost under his breath. "You never agree with anything I say, I bet if I go down there, for once you'll see that I'm right."

"I wouldn't do that if I were you," Janna said.

Victor growled angrily as he threw open the basement door, shocked by what he saw. The moment he stepped towards the landing, a long serpent-like tongue reached out towards him, wrapping around his waist and sucking him into the darkness. Moments later a satisfied growl rumbled from the ground below. Janna sighed and closed the door behind her, returning to the game by herself. Victor had always been an annoying friend, and Bartholomew was a far better confidant anyway, so she decided that it was a fair trade to keep him happy.

"I'm sorry, if you were right, I'd agree with you."
-Robin Williams

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